

Message Text

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PAGE 01 ALGIER 01287 220846Z
ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 /026 W
-----220848Z 128350 /10

O 220805Z MAY 77
FM AMEMBASSY ALGIERS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6503
INFO AMEMBASSY RABAT IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY MADRID PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT PRIORITY
USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L ALGIERS 1287

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: OVIP (VANCE, CYRUS), PFOR, UN, SS, US, AG
SUBJECT: SECRETARY'S MEETING WITH WALDHEIM: SAHARA PROBLEM

REF: SECTO 4127

1. WE BELIEVE US SHOULD BE EXTREMELY WARY OF GETTING INVOLVED IN SECGEN WALDHEIM'S INITIATIVE ON SAHARA BECAUSE WE ARE SKEPTICAL OF ALGERIAN MOTIVES.
2. IN PAST, BOUTEFLIKA HAS SEEMED MORE FLEXIBLE ON SAHARA THAN ALGERIAN POLICY HAS SUBSEQUENTLY PROVED TO BE. IN JULY 1975 HE APPEARED TO HAVE NEGOTIATED SETTLEMENT WITH MOROCCANS, BUT DEAL SUBSEQUENTLY FELL THROUGH. HE WAS ALSO REPORTED TO HAVE TALKED IN VERY CRITICAL TERMS OF GOA'S TOUGH SAHARA STANCE AT COLOMBO NA SUMMIT. WHETHER BOUTEFLIKA AND BOUMEDIENE GENUINELY AT ODDS ON SAHARA QUESTION, OR WHETHER FORMER'S INITIATIVES ARE TRIAL BALLOONS NOT CLEAR. WHAT IS EVIDENT, HOWEVER, IS THAT GOA POLICY HAS REMAINED CONSISTENTLY TOUGH.

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3. AT MOMENT, WE BELIEVE ALGERIANS TO BE ENGAGED IN DIPLOMATIC OFFENSIVE IN OAU, UN AND OTHER FORA WHICH, AS WE SEE IT, HAS TWO OBJECTIVES. FIRST, MANY ALGERIANS ARE WEARY OF WHOLE POLISARIO/SAHARA BUSINESS. POSSIBILITY OF FRENCH OR MOROCCAN RETALIATION FOR ZOUERATT RAID HAS, WE BELIEVE, FURTHER SOBERED AND UNNERVED LEADERSHIP HERE AND, HAS LED IT TO TAKE ACTION AIMED AT SHIFTING ONUS FOR ESCALATION OF TENSION

IN REGION ONTO FRENCH IN ORDER TO TRY FORESTALL EITHER FRENCH INTERVENTION ON SIDE OF MAURITANIANS OR MOROCCAN MILITARY STRIKE. SECOND, ALGERIANS ANXIOUS TO KEEP UN AND OAU SEIZED OF ISSUE IN WAKE OF OAU DECISION TO POSTPONE SPECIAL SUMMIT ON SAHARA. WALDHEIM VISIT TO REGION WOULD BE PLUS FOR THEM IN THIS EFFORT.

4. WE DOUBT, HOWEVER, THAT BOUTEFLIKA'S STATEMENTS TO WALDHEIM, SUBSEQUENT APPROACH BY BOUMEDIENE'S EMISSARY (APPARENTLY MOHAMED SAHNOUN, GOA'S AMBASSADOR TO WEST GERMANY AND AN ACTIVE SAHARA DIPLOMATIST), OR ALGERIAN DIPLOMATIC OFFENSIVE REFLECT GENUINE DESIRE TO FIND FACE-SAVING FORMULA. WE SEE NO INDICATION THAT BOUMEDIENE'S FUNDAMENTAL COMMITMENT TO SAHRAOUI CAUSE HAS WAVERED ALTHOUGH HE CLEARLY NOT SO EXERCISED ABOUT IT AS HE ONCE WAS. THERE SIMPLY DOES NOT APPEAR TO US TO BE ENOUGH EVIDENCE TO CONCLUDE THAT BOUTEFLIKA AND SAHNOUN INITIATIVES MORE THAN TACTICAL EFFORTS TO ENABLE ALGERIA TO ESCAPE UNSCATHED FROM FALLOUT OF ZOUEURATT AFFAIR AND TO KEEP SAHARA ON FRONT BURNER DIPLOMATICALLY.

5. IF FOREGOING ANALYSIS CORRECT, UTILIZATION OF USG GOOD OFFICES IN SUPPORT OF WALDHEIM INITIATIVE ON BEHALF OF ALGERIANS WOULD, FROM ALGIERS VIEWPOINT AT LEAST, USELESSLY COMPLICATE OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH HASSAN IN ORDER HELP ALGERIANS EXTRICATE THEMSELVES FROM TEMPORARILY TIGHT BIND AND PURSUE THEIR DIPLOMATIC EFFORTS. IT WOULD DO LITTLE TO INGRATIAE US WITH ALGERIANS OR RESOLVE BASIC CONFLICT.

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6. IF MOROCCANS ARE POISED TO RETALIATE BY MAJOR CROSSING OF ALGERIAN/MOROCCAN FRONTIER, THEN OUR INVOLVEMENT MIGHT BE USEFUL TO HEAD OFF DIRECT CONFLICT. WE DO NOT HAVE SENSE HERE THAT SUCH RETALIATION IS IMMINENT, BUT RABAT CAN MORE USEFULLY COMMENT ON THAT ASPECT. EVEN IF MOROCCO IS MASSING TROOPS, WE SUGGEST OUR ACTIVITIES MIGHT BETTER BE LIMITED OT PERSUADING HASSAN TO CALL OFF DIRECT MILITARY CONFRONTATION THAN TRY TO ARRANGE "FACE-SAVER" FOR ALGERIANS.

7. DESPITE ALL ABOVE, WE NOTE THAT SAHARA SAGA HAS BEEN FULL OF SURPRISES AND IT MIGHT JUST BE THAT ALGERIANS HAVE DECIDED TO TRY TO CALL WHOLE THING OFF. WE RECOMMEND, THEREFORE, THAT WE NOT DISCOURAGE WALDHEIM FROM EXPLORING ON HIS OWN POSSIBILITIES OF SOLUTION WITH PARTIES TO DISPUTE.LYNE

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: Z
Capture Date: 01-Jan-1994 12:00:00 am
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: INTERNATIONAL ARBITRATION, FOREIGN POLICY POSITION
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Sent Date: 22-May-1977 12:00:00 am
Decaption Date: 22 May 2009
Decaption Note: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1977ALGIER01287
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D770182-0828
Format: TEL
From: ALGIERS
Handling Restrictions:
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1977/newtext/t19770530/aaaabagc.tel
Line Count: 111
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 63e0428c-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION SS
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: EXDIS
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: EXDIS
Reference: 77 SECTO 4127
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 12-Nov-2004 12:00:00 am
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 2419028
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: SECRETARY'S MEETING WITH WALDHEIM: SAHARA PROBLEM
TAGS: OVIP, PFOR, SS, US, AG, UN, (VANCE, CYRUS R), (WALDHEIM, KURT)
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/63e0428c-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
22 May 2009
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009